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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY PRIORITY 3546
RUCNTXD/AMEMBASSY MAJURO 0029
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 0543
RUEHSV/AMEMBASSY SUVA 0114
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1090
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 1994
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C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 003127

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EINV](#) [TSPA](#) [ECPS](#) [ID](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: PAPUANS SEEING STARS OVER RUSSIA-INDONESIA SPACE
LAUNCH PLAN

REF: A. JAKARTA 2475

[1](#)B. MOSCOW 4447

[1](#)C. JAKARTA 1008

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph Legend Novak, reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Papuan politicians and civil society leaders have blasted the joint Russian-Indonesian space launch facility slated for construction on Biak Island off central Papua. While public protests against the project have yet to materialize, controversy over the issue is yet one more demonstration of the general lack of trust between Papua and Jakarta. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) FLY ME TO THE MOON: Indonesian and Russian officials finalized details of the space launch facility during President Putin's September visit to Jakarta (Refs A-B). Under the arrangement, a Russian transport plane would take off from Frans Kaisiepo Airport on Biak, an island off the north-central coast of Papua, carrying a rocket. When the plane reached the appropriate altitude, it would release the rocket, which would then launch itself into orbit. Biak is said to be an ideal location for the project because of its nearly equatorial location and Frans Kaisiepo's nearly 12,000-foot long runway. The project is expected to cost around \$120 million (Ref B). Some construction has already begun on the project, which is expected to be fully operational by 2010.

[1](#)3. (C) ON A DIFFERENT PLANET: In the months since the project was finalized, Papuan leaders have made it clear that they are hardly over the moon regarding the plan. Hanna Ikoyoge, Vice Chair of the Papuan People's Assembly (MRP), told poloff that many Papuans oppose the project and are worried about its impact on the local community. She cited the possibility of radiation leakage or other environmental damage. Other rumors circulating among Papuans assert that the facility will be used for launching spy satellites or nuclear missiles. (Note: Experts on this type of air-launch system claim that it has no more environmental impact than the take-off and landing of large cargo aircraft.)

[1](#)4. (C) In a recent meeting with poloff, Leonard Imbiri, Secretary General of the Papuan Traditional Council, echoed

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these themes but also raised political concerns. The central

government had negotiated the agreement without first consulting local leaders. The Biak Traditional Council had issued several statements claiming that the project infringed on the Biak people's traditional rights to the airport and surrounding area. The council had urged Papuans to protest against the project, shutting it down unless their demands for compensation were met. To date, however, no protests had materialized.

15. (C) IT DOESN'T TAKE A ROCKET SCIENTIST: The central government has made little effort to explain the project to Papuans, creating an information void that is rapidly being filled by sensational rumors and misinformation. At the same time, the Papuan response--give us compensation or we will shut the project down--appears to be little more than an attempt at extortion. Tensions over the project will likely increase further once construction gets into full swing in Biak.
HUME